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The use of tests in the education of the culturally deprived is presented. Appropriate use of such tests can make some contributions to the discovery of talent, to the diagnosis of learning difficulties, and to the better guidance and adjustment of culturally deprived children.

Most tests measure ability or aptitude and achievement. The former have received the most criticism in relation to their suitability for the disadvantaged child. Tests of general mental ability are given in order to determine likelihood of success in school work, to inform teachers of performance level and possible rate of progress. Critics claim that there is a built-in bias against lower-class background in these tests. Subsequent misinterpretation results in curtailing of educational opportunities. Tests do use verbal, numerical and academic content that is lacking in the background of disadvantaged children. Interpretation should indicate the child's present state of readiness to cope with classroom learning tasks, not his native potential. The use of achievement tests which show progress toward concrete goals of instruction is not challenged. Suggestions relevant to the culturally deprived are given for the selection, administration and interpretation of such tests.

The attitude with which the use of tests is approached is most important. The deprived children's feelings of alienation from the school should be lessened and motivation increased. As long as the necessary limitations are kept in mind, testing the culturally deprived can be valuable.

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Testing and the Culturally Disadvantaged Child[1]

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Mr. Orenberger, Mr. Cunningham, administrators and teachers of the Boston schools: Today's demonstration[2] brings forcefully to the attention of the Boston public, if needlessly to yours, the problem on which this series of lectures is intended to shed light. My talk, like those before it and those to come, deals with a particular aspect of a very complicated matter. I am here today to discuss the use of standardized tests in relation to the education of the "culturally disadvantaged;" and I am sure there are few among you who do not have some awareness of the peculiarly sensitive role of testing in this context.

Testing is a controversial topic today. The past two years have seen criticism of the uses of tests more widespread and intense than at any time in my memory, which spans more than a quarter of a century in this field. No little part of the criticism has to do specifically with the use—or the abuse—of tests in the education of the culturally disadvantaged. My presence here today signalizes a healthy awareness on the part of the administration of the Boston schools of the existence of the problems in this area, and a desire to look at them fully and frankly.

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[1] One of a series of lectures on Problems in Education of the Culturally Disadvantaged, sponsored by the Boston School Committee, delivered February 26, 1964 at the Mackey School, Boston.

[2] The refernce is to a public demonstration being conducted, coincidentally, on the day of the lecture, to draw attention to the educational problems of the culturally deprived child.

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Coming as I do as one of the later speakers in this series of lectures, it would be superfluous for me to dwell at length on the nature and the dimensions of the problem of meeting the educational needs of those we term "culturally disadvantaged." I shall not even add my definition of "culturally disadvantaged" to those you have already heard; you know well enough the type of child with whom we are here concerned. By any reasonable definition the numbers and proportion of such children in the schools of Boston, as in the schools of every large city in this country, are formidable. By some estimates, in 1950, perhaps one pupil in ten in the 15 largest cities of the country might have then been considered "culturally disadvantaged;" by 1960 the proportion had risen to an estimated one in three, and by 1970, according to the same analysts, one of each two pupils in the public schools of these 15 cities will come from the so-called culturally deprived or disadvantaged groups in our society. Exact figures as to the proportions are not important; even with a great deal of error in the estimates, it is perfectly clear that meeting the needs of these children must be regarded as our preeminent educational problem at the present time.

It is so, in the first place, because of the fiercely urgent human need that we provide more fulfillment, more self-realization for these persons who have, for whatever reasons, been disadvantaged. We know from the changing pattern of occupations that increasingly the person who lacks education and marketable skills is going to be on the waste heap in our civilization. The proportion of jobs that do not require specialized training and educational attainment is shrinking. Unless we provide these children, as all of our children, with the fullest of educational opportunities, we are dooming them to a life that must be filled with frustration. It is no wonder that Dr. Conant warns us, as he does, that we are building "social dynamite," if we fail to provide the wherewithal for these disadvantaged youth to share in the benefits of our society.

And this problem presses upon us with another kind of urgency as well. We know beyond question that if we are to meet the anticipated requirements for professional workers of every kind—teachers, engineers, doctors, architects, lawyers, and for technically trained personnel for our increasingly automated industries, we must find the talent in the groups that are now our disadvantaged groups. We are now getting from the upper third, perhaps from the upper half of our students, all that we may reasonably expect, or almost all, of candidates to take over these more demanding professional occupations. We must devise the tools that will enable us to locate among the presently culturally disadvantaged groups those who will fill the gaps and meet society's needs for highly skilled and highly trained personnel. So at both ends of the scale, whether our concern is with insuring for all the means of attaining minimum requirements for respectability and a modicum of success in our society, or whether we focus upon our needs for highly talented individuals, we must concentrate upon the resources that are to be found in these groups that now contribute so heavily to the lower 20%, 30% or whatever the figure may be of our school population.

My mission today is to suggest to you some of the contributions that appropriate use of standardized tests can make to the discovery of talent, to the better diagnosis of learning difficulties, to the better guidance and adjustment of youth in these so-called culturally

deprived groups. I shall talk first with respect to ability or aptitude tests, and secondly with respect to achievement tests. I shall, as I think I must, direct some of my attention to the serious questions that are raised as to the fairness of these tests to children from the disadvantaged groups.

Let me first consider with you *ability* or *aptitude* measures. What is their function in a program of pupil assessment, in the classification of pupils for improvement of learning? What is their special role, if any, in connection with the assessment of the abilities of culturally deprived pupils? The most common type of ability test is the one that we term an "intelligence" test, or sometimes, a scholastic aptitude test, or a test of general mental ability. Why do we give such tests? We give them in schools chiefly so that we can have a better basis for grouping pupils according to their likelihood of success *in mastering the work of the school,* and I stress this last point for reasons that will become clear when I talk to the issue of the fairness of these tests. We give them to help the teacher establish reasonable goals for pupils, to know the level of performance, and the rate of progress that she may reasonably expect of an individual youngster. We give them to help in the diagnosis of learning difficulties. If a child is experiencing difficulty in coping with the work of the class, the teacher wants to know why—and one possible reason is that he is not bright enough to cope with the work. We give these tests in the hope of discovering some talent or ability that is not manifesting itself in the child's school work, or on achievement tests—for the content of most intelligence tests, or scholastic aptitude tests, is designed to be but little influenced by specific in-school instruction.

It is in connection with this type of test

that questions are most commonly raised on the matter of fairness. The case against fairness, so to speak, goes like this:

It has been observed from the earliest days of intelligence testing that the *average* performance of children on tests of this kind varies systematically with their social or socio-economic level. Children from professional families tend to do best, from managerial or semi-professional backgrounds next best, and so on, with differences on the intelligence tests paralleling the socio-economic level or the cultural level of the home. There is no one, as far as I am aware, who is disposed to question that this is what you will find whenever you study the relation between *average* scores on the typical intelligence test and the social or cultural level of groups of children. (Less well publicized, regrettably, has been the overlap among the distributions of scores for the various socio-economic groups: despite the differences in the averages, there are in any socio-economic or cultural group, some who do very well, some who do poorly, and many in between, on the typical test.)

Disagreement comes when we attempt to interpret the findings. Are they evidence that the tests discriminate against children from lower-class background, that they have a built-in middle- or upper-class bias? Or are the findings accurately descriptive of realities concerning the distribution of academic learning potential among members of groups of various socio-economic levels? Or are the findings susceptible of still other interpretations?

Those who see in these differences evidence of the unfairness of these tests are quick to point to the type of material in the tests as loaded against the underpriviliged child. If one examines

the typical intelligence test, he will see that it consists of a set of questions largely verbal in character, having a decided academic flavor, and ordinarily including, in addition to the verbal material, numerical material that looks as if it depends somewhat on success in arithmetic learnings despite the test-maker's goal, mentioned above, that it depend very little on school instruction. Children from culturally deprived homes, by this line of reasoning, simply have not had an opportunity to learn the sorts of things that are covered in these intelligence tests. Therefore, one must expect that they are not going to do so well as the children from more fortunate homes, where there are plenty of books, where there is an intense interest on the part of the parents in academic and verbal sorts of things. Yet, on the basis of performance on these tests, we proceed to label, or mislabel, the culturally deprived child as dull, or slow-learning, and pattern our instruction of him accordingly. All too often we use that result as a basis for curtailing the educational opportunities to be afforded this culturally disadvantaged youth, on the ground that he is lacking in the capacity to profit from them. This seems to me the essence of the charge of unfairness leveled at these tests for children from culturally deprived backgrounds.

Is the criticism a valid one? I think that there is no absolute answer. For my part, despite obvious and necessary partisanship, I am in no wise disposed to dismiss it as having no validity. Any maker of a test that purports to be an intelligence test will readily admit, will indeed insist, that underlying assumptions in the interpretation of test performance as indicative of some hypothetical ability are (1) that all examinees have had substantially equal opportunity to learn the kinds of things covered by the test and (2) that all

examinees are equally motivated to do their best on the test. If these assumptions are not warranted, if there is either serious, notable, significant deprivation in background for one examinee relative to another, or marked difference in motivation from one examinee to another, it is impossible to interpret the performance of these two examinees in the same fashion. I think every responsible test-maker recognizes the possibility that certain tests may place a premium on types of background, or types of information, that are not possessed to the same degree by all examinees; there is thus a possibility that "intelligence," however we may define it, or "scholastic aptitude," or whatever we infer from the test performance, may be underestimated in the case of certain subjects whose backgrounds, especially with respect to exposure to verbal, numerical, academic types of content, are notably deficient, or who are not concerned to do well on such tests.

Yet, we must consider the purposes which the tests are intended to serve. Chief of these is the appraisal of the child's current readiness to cope with the academic tasks appropriate for his level. The better a test predicts this kind of success, the higher the correlation between it and school learning, then the better we must judge the test to be for this purpose. The fact is that the tests which are more prognostic of success in learning to read, to spell, to do arithmetic, are tests whose content is verbal and academic in character, such as the more widely used group intelligence tests. If these tests seem to favor the middle- or upper-class child, it is because they place a premium on types of abilities important for success in academic work. If there is a question of bias, it concerns the nature of the tasks set by the school, and only secondarily the tests.

The question that naturally comes to mind when one considers the unequal exposure examinees may have had to the content of ability tests is whether tests cannot be so constructed that differences in cultural backgrounds among examinees would have little or no effect on scores. Can we not have a "culture-free" test? I give it as the judgment of most test experts that there have been no successful efforts to develop tests that have this property of culture-freeness; in fact, to most test specialists, the culture-free test seems an intrinsically unattainable goal. Even the more modest goal of a "culture-fair" test, that would be as predictive of school success as our present tests, has thus far eluded us. I would be the last to discourage attempts at the production of tests that seek to minimize the effect of variations in cultural backgrounds without harmful consequences to the predictive utility of the scores; but I would be misleading you if I suggested that there is any imminent likelihood of the appearance of tests that will be all that we might want in this regard. Tests can be built that yield smaller differences among examinees from varying socio-economic or cultural backgrounds, but these tests seem to measure characteristics that are less predictive of success in academic tasks. As far as the school is concerned, there is little point in using tests that are not relevant to the prediction or assessment of success in attainment of the goals of instruction as they exist at any given moment, however worthy, useful, or socially beneficial the qualities measured by such other tests may be.

Perhaps much of the confusion or error in the interpretation of the results of intelligence tests could be avoided by so simple an expedient as not applying the term "intelligence" to whatever it is the test measures. "Intelligence," for the man in the street, and indeed even

for professionals, carries connotations that are not sustainable in the application of the test score to an understanding of a child. Particularly, there persists a tendency to regard the score as an index of native endowment, and to ascribe to it a mystical constancy or fixity—notions that the test-makers are the first to disavow. Why not regard a child's score on a mental ability test as merely the best index of his present state of readiness to cope with the classroom learning tasks, and as such, a vital guide in planning appropriate instruction?

Let me offer you an analogy that may help in evaluating this issue of test fairness. If we take a youngster who has suffered malnutrition over a period of years, who has not had the benefit of adequate health care, and put him on a scale, we may well discover that he is ten, or fifteen, or twenty pounds underweight. We do not then say the scale is biased because of the deprivation the child has suffered. We take this information as currently and accurately descriptive of an important fact about this child—a fact that can be used to his advantage in planning a program calculated to make up for the deficiencies in his earlier care. And if we do provide him with proper food and care, hopefully the scale will another time give us reassuring evidence of the success of our efforts. I suggest to you that this is the way of looking at a test score. The test is giving us a piece of information about a child's performance here and now, which information, if properly used, can be extremely helpful in planning the educational endeavors of the child.

To summarize then, my reaction to the charge that tests are unfair to the culturally disadvantaged: Yes—children of culturally deprived backgrounds may have had less exposure to, and be less

interested in, the type of content of some ability and aptitude tests than others more fortunate, and they may do less well on the tests on this account. Such poorer performance may, and in some cases no doubt has, led to erroneous judgments about the potential, or native ability of these children. But this is neither a defect nor a matter of any built-in bias of these tests, given the purpose which the tests are intended to serve. Test scores, like other information, are subject to misinterpretation; the remedy is not to dispense with the information, but to improve the understanding of its significance. Abandoning the tests is burning the barn to catch the mouse.

Considerably less controversial—indeed almost unexceptionable—is the use of *achievement tests* with culturally deprived youngsters, as with all other pupils. It is axiomatic that the school and the teacher must know the present status of each child, and the progress he is making, with respect to certain concrete goals of instruction. No one objects to measuring, as accurately as we know how, the level of attainment of a pupil, whatever his background, in basic reading abilities, in arithmetic, in English, in spelling, in history. As long as acquisition of these skills and knowledges is deemed a worthy goal for every child, we cannot escape the responsibility for finding out where every child stands. Without this information we are in no position to improve, or to focus more effectively, the efforts of the classroom teacher; neither can we evaluate the effectiveness of the educational program offered. We are, as someone has said, carrying on target practice in the dark if we do not avail ourselves of this kind of information. Whatever advantages or limitations a child brings to his school learning tasks, the school and the teacher still must be concerned with how successfully he

is attaining the goals of instruction; and this is one of the contributions that the standarized achievement test makes, whether in the case of the culturally disadvantaged or the more fortunate pupil.

So, it is not the fact of the use of achievement tests with underprivileged children that need engage us this morning, but rather, perhaps, the manner of their use with such youngsters. I would, therefore, like to make to you two or three practical suggestions concerning ways of dealing with tests, of particular relevance to the needs of the culturally disadvantaged.

1. Here in Boston, much of the test selection is centrally done, but such selection does not, it seems to me, preclude a responsibility on the part of each teacher to consider the appropriateness of any test, whether it is centrally chosen or chosen in the individual school, for the culturally deprived children. Is the test of suitable difficulty? Is the content of the test such as to motivate and interest the pupil—to enliven, if you will, the test-taking task? Who, if not the classroom teacher, is in a position to judge these particular characteristics of tests? Do not sit in silence if you are convinced that any test you are asked to give your pupils is inappropriate for them, for whatever reasons, the ones I've mentioned or others that you would be aware of. Make this known. The persons who are responsible for test selection are not omniscient, any more than are the ones who make tests. No one can know better than you, in the classroom, the details of the appropriateness of tests for your particular pupils. Share that information.

2. Secondly, let me say a word about test administration. I am not so naive

as to believe that the average classroom teacher approaches the task of giving standardized tests with great enthusiasm and delight. The administration of these tests for most teachers, even those well disposed toward testing, is viewed as a kind of routine, perhaps not very exciting part of her classroom duties; and by teachers who test only because they must, the administration may indeed be done in a spirit of resentment or at best of grudging cooperation. May I suggest to you that such attitudes are particularly harmful with respect to children from culturally disadvantaged backgrounds and may well jeopardize the validity of their test results. These children need more evidence that society, as represented by the school and by the classroom teacher, cares about them; that the teacher, in administering a standard test is not just imposing another barrier of little or no seeming significance or sense. The one thing that we are told again and again about the culturally deprived youngsters is that typically they are alienated from the ordinary school situation. The academic type of endeavor is not one that has a powerful appeal to them; often it appears they could not care less about what goes on in the classroom, including testing. Coping with this attitude has to be one of the preeminent tasks of the teacher, one that has to precede and accompany efforts at instruction. These pupils need to feel that in giving tests the teacher is deeply concerned about how well they do, that she wants to have them do their best, that she wants the test information only so that she can help them.

3. Finally, in the interpretation of test results of youngsters from culturally deprived backgrounds, you should have in mind exceptional cautions. I

have already suggested the nature of such cautions and reservations. I have said that in some cases there is the virtual certainty that these examinees have not had the amount and kind of background that would enable them to cope on an equal footing with other examinees; they may not share the motivation to do well on the tests that better circumstanced children acquire as a matter of course; they may be so distracted by home and family misfortunes as to be incapable of doing themselves justice on tests or in other school activities. I do not conclude, as do some of the critics, that we should therefore discontinue the use of tests with such children. I maintain that the information the tests give is none the less valuable, provided that the teacher, or whoever uses the tests, has in mind the necessary cautions and limitations, that he does not generalize from performance on a particular day, on a particular test, concerning such things as the native endowment of this youngster, his potential for success in college or a particular career, or in other ways go beyond warrantable inferences from the test score.

I have attempted to convey to you a feeling, a spirit, an attitude, more than anything else, about the use of tests with the disadvantaged child. I could have elected to dwell at length upon techniques, upon the skills of test selection, administration and interpretation, for such competencies are deserving of attention and study. But perhaps, after all, they are less important in improving the use of tests with the culturally disadvantaged than the attitude, the spirit, with which one approaches the task. Standardized testing is, in a sense, a scientific, impersonal, disinterested approach to the study of children; but even so, we may maintain in our testing,

of disadvantaged children, as in all other contacts with them an air of acceptance, of dedication, of wanting them to share to the full in what we have to give. A doctor's ministrations are no less effective, no less "scientific," if they are tendered with warmth, with genuine regard for the patient as a person. Classroom testing, by the same token, need lose none of its scientific, objective character if it is conducted in a spirit of concern for each pupil's welfare; indeed, in individual testing, we consider the establishment of this rapport between examiner and subject as contributing to the validity of the test result.

The city of Boston and its people are no strangers to the problems of a minority group coming into a culture and an environment reluctant to accept them. Where should there be a better recollection and understanding of what a culturally deprived group needs and wants than in Boston? I need not remind you that out of a group which but a short three generations ago knew its period of cultural disadvantagement here in Boston, came one who attained our nation's highest office. Let us all hope that in much less than three generations, it will be possible to point to many representatives of the disadvantaged groups whose problems concern us today, who shall have contributed in similar fashion to the welfare of the country, and the fulfillment of their own aspirations. Let it be your boast that in your teaching and in your testing you so comport yourselves as to hasten the day of full and rewarding participation in our society by these children we now call culturally deprived.

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